

25 MAY 1975

Kennedys linked with plot to kill Castro

By RICHARD BEESTON

in Washington

THE commission investigating the American Central Intelligence Agency has obtained evidence that a plot to assassinate Fidel Castro, the Cuban Prime Minister, was authorised at a high level of the Kennedy Administration.

Among those said to be involved was the late President's brother, Mr. Robert Kennedy, then Attorney General.

The commission has the minutes of a 1962 meeting showing that senior Administration officials discussed the possible assassination and that later secret plans, code-named Operation Mongoose, were drawn up.

The conspiracy was hatched after the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion. According to one intelligence source Mr. Robert Kennedy was reported to have told officials that his brother had been "humiliated" and that Castro had to be disposed of.

The Kennedy brothers at the time were known to be furious with the C.I.A. over the Bay of Pigs fiasco and according to the same intelligence source Operation Mongoose was planned as an independent project largely involving elements outside the C.I.A. The director of the C.I.A. at the time may not have been informed of the conspiracy.

Illegal activities

The C.I.A. has been seriously weakened and demoralised in recent months by attacks in the Press and by Congressional and Administration investigations into its alleged illegal activities, including plots to assassinate foreign leaders.

The latest evidence before the commission under the chairmanship of Vice-President Rockefeller suggests that if any blame is to be allocated, the Kennedy White House will also have to bear its share.

The chairman of the Senate intelligence committee investigating the C.I.A., Senator Frank Church, a Democrat, indicated for the first time on Friday that his committee is also looking higher than the C.I.A. itself for leading figures who may have planned Castro's murder.

A man who was a top officer of the C.I.A. during and after the Bay of Pigs operation has told me of "pressures" outside the Agency to bring about Castro's death. Other sources say that two days after the top level Administration meeting to discuss the possible assassination of Castro a memo was written by an assistant to Mr. Robert McNamara, the Secretary of Defence, directing the C.I.A. to develop contingency plans for the Castro assassination.

Subsequently, it is understood, American-sponsored plots were made against Castro's life.

No recollection

The memo was understood to have provided the necessary authority for drawing up the assassination plans and was allegedly written by Maj. Gen. Edward Lansdale, the American counter-insurgency expert and prototype for Graham Greene's "Quiet American."

Both Mr. McNamara, now President of the World Bank, and Gen. Lansdale deny any recollection of the memo.

Sources say that the minutes of the original meeting to discuss the assassination dated Aug. 10, 1962, now in the possession of the Rockefeller Commission, refer to the meeting of the Operation Mongoose group whose official title was, "Special Group (augmented)."

The meeting was attended by Mr. McNamara, Mr. Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State, John McCone, Director of the C.I.A., and Mr. McGeorge Bundy, President Kennedy's national security adviser. The minutes show that the fifth member of the Group, Mr. Robert Kennedy, was absent from the meeting.

Other sources suggest that after the original meeting and memo the Operation Mongoose

planning was taken largely out of C.I.A. hands and that the then C.I.A. director was left with the impression that it had been dropped.

In fact, according to some intelligence sources, experts in Guerrilla warfare unconnected with the C.I.A. were recruited.

Subsequent attempts on Castro's life were distinct from previously reported C.I.A. involvement before the Bay of Pigs—with two Mafia figures, Sam Giancana and John Roselli, in earlier efforts to kill Castro.

The Mafia was reported to be out to get Castro, who had closed down its gambling casinos in Havana, and to have been provided with poison pellets by the C.I.A. to put in the Cuban leader's food or drink.

In 1962 Robert Kennedy learned of the original C.I.A. assassination plot and was reported by two of his former assistants to have ordered that the conspiracy should be "turned off."

Mafia warning

However, Lawrence Houston, the then C.I.A. general counsel, has a different version. Kennedy was warned by Houston in 1962 that prosecution of the two Mafia men might result if the poison pellet plot was disclosed.

Several sources claim that Kennedy told Houston: "Next time you deal with the Mafia, come to me first," but that otherwise he did not voice any objections.